

Boys forced into pool to bathe: Mount Cashel civil trial witness

Barb Sweet (barbara.sweet@thetelegram.com)

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To save money on hot shower water, boys would be forced by the Christian Brothers into the orphanage swimming pool with a bar of Sunlight soap to wash up, a witness told the Mount Cashel civil trial this morning, while recounting how he was dragged onetime from the locker room into the pool.



The Mount Cashel orphanage, shown above in a file photo. — Telegram file photo

The witness is the fourth former resident to testify among four test cases in a trial to determine whether the RC Episcopal Corp. of St. John's is liable for physical and sexual abuse by some Christian Brothers at the orphanage during the period — 1940s to 1960s. There are 60 claimants in all represented by the test cases. (As well various other law firms, in have 20 similar cases in total.)

The witness said he would hide in the locker room to avoid the swimming pool bathing ritual and would cry out in anguish over why he was placed in the orphanage and why his father had to die. He told the court last week that his father died in a hit and run accident when the witness was a young boy. He was placed in Mount Cashel and girls in the family were sent to Belvedere orphanage.

The witness recalled some boys were whacked on the hands as many as 50 times a day in front of their class and the worst he saw it for harsh discipline at the orphanage was in the period 1946-50.

The witness is being cross-examined today by Chris Blom, one of the Ontario lawyers representing the Roman Catholic church, which contends it did not run the orphanage and therefore is not liable. It maintains the facility was solely operated by the lay order Christian Brothers.

Blom spent much of the morning sifting through the man's military records, pointing out factors that led to him not getting further promotion, including hearing difficulties and an easy come/easy go attitude. But Blom also noted that the man had positive comments on his record and was allowed to continue on for a few years in the military beyond retirement age in an era (late 1980s/early 1990s) when others were being urged to go in their 40s.

The witness, who like the other three former residents, cannot be identified due to a publication ban, said if he waited a few more years, he would have been the longest serving corporal in the Canadian Armed Forces' history.

Last week, the man had detailed to his own lawyer, Geoff Budden, some drinking and discipline incidents he attributed to a chip on his shoulder, caused by abuse at Mount Cashel.

Follow live tweets from the courtroom @bsweettweets and #mountcashelciviltrial and look for expanded coverage online and in Tuesday's print edition.

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